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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests three major directions for improving the family-school relationship, and thus developing productive environments for learning. First, a meaning of curriculum is defined to determine where parents and teachers should direct their attention in order to improve the curriculum in families and schools. Second, four existing assumptions about education that separate families from schools are examined and criticized: (1) academic competence results from the successful completion of tasks under the direction of a teacher in a school; (2) teachers are primarily responsible for decisions about the academic (mainly cognitive) growth of children in school while parents are expected to make the major decisions about the physical and social or emotional development of children in the family; (3) the important variables in the family that affect academic competence are essentially inalterable; and (4) the organizational conditions that hinder teachers from including home environment as part of the curriculum are practically impossible to influence from inside the school. New assumptions which might be used for forming closer associations between families and schools are mentioned. Thirdly, a design for teaming parents and teachers is proposed, one that would encourage both groups to collaborate in building complementary learning environments for elementary school children. (Author/SS)

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PARENTS AND TEACHERS TOGETHER:

DIRECTIONS FOR DEVELOPING EQUALITY IN LEARNING THROUGH ENVIRONMENTS IN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

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PARENTS AND TEACHERS TOGETHER:
DIRECTIONS FOR DEVELOPING EQUALITY IN LEARNING THROUGH
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If it were possible to look at family and school surroundings through the eyes of children, we might see clear visions of how to seek excellence in educational environments and greater equality in learning. Children have opportunities to observe the conditions of each setting and to realize the impact resulting from both spheres of influence. Parents and teachers should also have access to views of this landscape for learning. However, strained communication, conflicting roles, and other persistent barriers separate the adults from each others' domains. Although parents and teachers have collective responsibility for the education of children, seldom do they share a grip on family and school environments that can tap the potential all children have for learning.

Educators who are developing curricula to integrate varied environments must realize the counterproductive nature of the present relationship between families and schools. For example, conditions in both settings often work at cross purposes so what children accomplish in one place is stifled or unlearned in another. It is important for parents and teachers to join together to eliminate dysfunctional aspects of learning environments, to reinforce conditions that have a positive impact, to maintain contrasts that contribute to academic competence, and to create new blends that encourage learning.[1]

There is mounting evidence that the family is vital to and intimately linked with school learning.[2] Yet, family environment is seldom included in the development of school curriculum. To ignore this homeground is to overlook variables that can be altered to increase the ability of children to learn.[3]

Typically, the solution to inadequate academic stimulation in the family has been to bring the child into school at an earlier and earlier age in order to compensate for the lack of education provided by parents. This approach suggests that parents and conditions in families are the problem rather than part of the solution for educating children. We think early intervention that replaces the family contributes to distance and conflict between parents and teachers. Also, supplanting the family results in children receiving mixed and conflicting messages about learning. The creation of a separate curriculum without improving or altering variables in the ongoing family environment can generate academic and cultural contradictions that hinder learning. Unintended negative consequences of early intervention by schools are particularly laborious for children from less abundant environments; for them this gap between family and school is larger and more difficult to negotiate. To better enable all students to learn at high standards, educators might revitalize rather than replace the contributions of the family.

We are not suggesting that the family should remake itself in the image of the school, or vice versa. Instead, we are arguing that both places can become more effective in educating children. Parents

and teachers can work together to make better environments in each setting and, in the process, build the conditions that increase learning as a child experiences both spheres of influence. To that end, we suggest three major directions for improving the family-school relationship and thus developing productive environments for learning. First, a meaning of curriculum is defined to determine where parents and teachers should direct their attention in order to improve the curriculum in families and schools. Second, some existing assumptions about education that separate families from schools are examined and new assumptions to be used for forming closer associations are mentioned. Finally, a design for teaming parents and teachers is proposed, one that would encourage both groups to collaborate in building complementary learning environments for elementary school children.

Definition: Curriculum as Environments for Learning

In the catalogue of education's more curious creatures, few are as complex as the curriculum. Although the word is casually used in the literature and in discussions about schooling and education as though its meaning were common, a more careful consideration shows that different and distinct meanings are assigned to curriculum. Scholars are far from agreement as to how the term should be defined.

Our talks with students, teachers, principals, and parents suggest that in the practical reality of schools and classrooms, curriculum means different things to different people. To students

curriculum seems to signify homework, tests, and "all those classes." To many teachers it means printed materials, textbooks, goals, objectives, lesson plans, study sheets, and tests. Principals tend to view curriculum as what is taught by teachers and the packaged curriculum programs and materials produced by publishing companies or curriculum committees. Parents often consider the number and types of courses offered by the school to be the curriculum.[4] The intention here is not to argue that one fixed definition is essential for improving the quality of curriculum in families and schools.[5] Rather, the purpose is to structure a definition that reflects the dynamics of reality in both settings. The definition shows where parents and teachers might come together to concentrate on the improvement of conditions in families and schools and on the development of coordinated learning environments.

The curriculum consists of a complex network of environmental determinants exerting an influence on the behavior of individuals. These determinants are physical, social, and intellectual conditions that shape and reinforce behavior. For example, within family and school settings learners are exposed to a sequence of learning tasks, a collection of learning materials, and the influence of individual personalities and collective norms.

Although many writers[6] have described environment as a powerful determinant of behavior, we caution that not all of the environment should be considered "curriculum." The sources of family or school environment are multiple and complex: from the influence of

architectural design, to the social and economic conditions of the neighborhood group, to the historic and economic functions of schooling, to the availability of resources, and so on. We reserve the term "curriculum" for the environmental ingredients that have been deliberately shaped to create a context for learning. Freud's dictum, "where id is, let ego be," urged his patients to seize hold of the impulsive, contradictory, and irrational mix of pressures ruling their lives. In an analogous way, we urge "where unexamined environment is, let curriculum be" to suggest that curriculum consists of external conditions for learning that result from constructing and reconstructing environments.

Furthermore, the curriculum consists of environmental stimuli as perceived or interpreted by participating individuals. As Murray[7] suggests, it is the child's perceptions of environmental conditions that guide behavior. Children actively respond to environmental demands and expectations according to the ways they perceive them. Because the individual's perceptions of environment also serve as determinants of behavior, in our definition, curriculum consists of the perceived (or internal), as well as the external conditions that either foster or hinder learning.

When we extend this definition into the practical settings of families and schools, we find that curriculum can be more specifically characterized by three separate yet interrelated parts--the expressed, the implied, and the emergent. The connections among these dimensions contribute to the dynamic nature of curriculum. Our definition, then,

consists of external and perceived conditions for learning that can be further described in terms of their expressed, implied, and emergent dimensions. These dimensions put one's finger on where parents and teachers can work to make educational environments better.

The Expressed

This dimension of curriculum is a written statement expressed in terms of intended learning objectives, learning opportunities, a sequence of content, and evaluation procedures. The expressed dimension is the course of study or the syllabus, an acknowledged plan stating what is to be learned and describing how to teach and evaluate. The academic disciplines are often the major data source for deciding the content of the expressed curriculum. This dimension is the "planned for" or pre-determined part of curriculum that is common in schools but is seldom part of the family environment. In the family, the expressed dimension seems to be limited to an acknowledged and often reinforced set of expectations for cultural understanding and proper behavior. Yet, sometimes parents and teachers combine efforts to plan and implement specifically designed learning conditions in the family. These activities or purposefully developed variables that are introduced in the family to encourage learning would also be considered expressed curriculum.

The Implied

This dimension of curriculum consists of wily messages received by learners from the physical, social and intellectual

environment. Similar to what is known as the hidden curriculum, this dimension includes hints given off by the rules and traditions embedded as regularities in the ongoing way of life in a family or school. Also, the implied dimension refers to unintended learning that results because of what is included or omitted in academic content that is taught. The conditions of the implied are further spelled out in those actions of children and adults which are only rarely verbalized or explained. The implied dimension is critical because the child's perceptions of the conditions that make up the habitats of the family and school result in a personal view that influences learning, either in a positive or negative way. For this reason, the perceptions of children toward their environment are the central data source for determining the implied curriculum. This dimension exists in both settings where children live and learn. Also, it is the implied curriculum that results from contradictions children experience as they move back and forth between the family and the school.

The Emergent

This dimension includes the ongoing alterations, adjustments, and additions that are made to insure harmony between the uniqueness of the individual child and the character of the curriculum. The emergent serves as a correcting measure, smoothing out and putting the expressed and implied parts of the curriculum in line with each other

and with children. In other words, the emergent dimension intervenes when there are excessive gaps between learners and the curriculum. It reduces chances of disconnection, unnecessary failure, and boredom. For this reason, the academic and personal nature of the single child is the major data source for the emergent dimension. This part of the curriculum exists to varied degrees of intensity in families and schools. The dimension is necessary for building healthy curriculum conditions in either site or between settings.

Deliberately constructed environments for learning take into account these three related dimensions of curriculum. It is important for parents and teachers to recognize that where the expressed and implied curriculum support each other, learning is likely to be most powerful. It is here that academic competence might be developed and that attitudes and values are probably learned most effectively. Where the expressed and implied curriculum are in conflict, one would expect the implied dimension to become dominant. It is not what is intended (what we talk about) but what we do (action we take) that becomes compelling. Also, where the expressed and the implied run counter to each other, contradictory messages are likely to be received by children. In this case, the emergent dimension takes precedence, calling for parent and teacher decisions that correct the disconnections. There is a curriculum in families and in schools that accounts, in a major way, for the differences in children's academic success. The definition we advance of curriculum as environments for learning opens a perspective that parents and teachers can use to form

and blend conditions in families and schools to maximize learning. Also, the dimensions of curriculum provide direction for adults to splice conditions from each setting to form a congruence that will benefit children. However, the application of this definition depends on leadership and cooperative efforts from adults in families and schools. Action demands more than a definition alone, it also requires a new way of thinking about education in families and schools.

Assumptions About the Educational Process

As professional educators assume increasing responsibility for the learning of children outside the family, a way of thinking that stresses separation between family and school starts to develop. In schools, as in hospitals, the expectation holds that education, like health, is a service provided by professionals when the child visits an institutional setting. In both instances, the role of parents is to depend on the professionals and their delivery of services, not to provide a preventive, corrective, or supportive environment. Clearly, this way of thinking must be re-examined when certain client groups or individuals fail to thrive under the institution's care. In this section of the paper four key assumptions often made by parents and teachers about their roles in the educational process are discussed. A revised version of each assumption is proposed. The purpose is to build a foundation for an expanded way of thinking about the contributions of families and schools to the education of children.

Existing Assumption 1. Academic competence results from the successful completion of tasks under the direction of a teacher in a school.

This assumption suggests that the response to children who consistently are not learning would be to provide more classroom instruction, either at an earlier age or for extended periods of time. These can be considered compensatory strategies, tried with limited success in recent years. In particular, evaluations of early intervention programs that were school-centered showed that the immediate impact these programs do have on learning decreases after the termination of the program, leaving little long-term increase in academic competence.[8] This attrition creates the puzzling necessity of re-teaching at later ages skills supposedly mastered in earlier years.

However, evaluations of early intervention programs that were family-centered find that the parents' provision of educational experiences has a long-term effect upon academic achievement.[9] Indeed, evidence shows that language development is an important basis for academic competence, and that language development begins during infancy and can be influenced in a major way through pre-school and early-school years. The data also show that experiences in the family are important variables for language development. It can be concluded, then, that family education of young children is a major contributor to the development of academic competence.[10]

If development of academic concepts and skills is viewed as being promoted by the family as well as the school, then attention is given to collaboration between both settings. The frame of reference

used in developing programs to increase academic competence changes from only an emphasis on classroom intervention to one of family-school cooperation. Teachers in classrooms can coordinate their curriculum with parents working on parallel purposes in families. Hence, a new assumption emerges.

> New Assumption 1. Academic competence results from the successful completion of a broad range of activities both in families and in schools, particularly as these activities are reinforced through the interactions of the child with both parents and teachers.

Linked to this shift of perspective from school intervention to family and school collaboration is another existing assumption about the decision-making responsibilities of parents and teachers.

> Existing Assumption 2. Teachers are primarily responsible for decisions about the academic (mainly cognitive) growth of children in school, while parents are expected to make the major decisions about the physical and social or emotional development of children in the family.

One basis for the general failure of parents and teachers to work jointly on improving education in families and schools is the assumption that they have basically different responsibilities. In effect, it is thought there are few decisions they can or should make together. This view leads each group to retreat to and defend separate spheres of territory and control.[11] Responsible for academic growth, teachers turn the classroom into a domain where their decisions can be made and implemented without fear of parental interference. If teachers welcome parents into their classrooms, they

usually ask them to observe or perform mundane chores. Their presence is considered temporary and peripheral to the classroom experiences of children. In the same way, parents create an inviolate space within their families, with customs and traditions teachers are generally not permitted to view or participate in, much less question. As a result, parents often refrain from visiting the school, because it is hard to accept being excluded from a part of their child's world. So, too, teachers rarely visit families where they presumably have no appropriate role.

However, when parents are viewed as having important information about children and as making lasting contributions to the development of academic competence, a basis for working together can be created. Further, a recent review of twenty-four pilot and experimental programs makes it clear that family-based reinforcement of school behavior is proving to be an efficient and effective method for motivating children to overcome some of their most persistent difficulties.[12] When what parents and families can contribute to increased academic competence is recognized, a new assumption can be made about the sharing of decision-making responsibilities.

New Assumption 2. As the persons who are closest to the learner, parents and teachers together should design and implement educational environments to assist children in their cognitive, affective, and physical development in the family and school.

Another existing assumption that prevents parents and teachers from taking action is the idea that little can be changed in the

family to increase the academic competence of children.

Existing Assumption 3. The important variables in the family that affect academic competence are essentially inalterable.

This way of thinking grants the importance of the family environment, but denies that variables in the family can be changed. For years, study after study of the sources of academic achievement attempted to correlate academic success or failure with relatively inalterable variables like cultural background, socioeconomic status (as measured by parental education, income, or occupation), family size, sibling order, and so on.[13] Attempts were also made to relate intelligence measures to the same variables, suggesting that conditions which influence the learner in the family are givens with which educators must cope.

However, in the last twenty years, research approaches that emphasize socio-psychological or behavioral processes thought conducive to learning suggest that specific activities parents do with their children in the family can have a direct influence on academic competence. Some of the variables that have been examined include: encouragement of children to learn well, parental aspirations, the provision of help for learning, and the organization of time and space for study. Recently, Iverson and Walberg conducted a quantitative synthesis of eighteen studies of the family environments of 5,831 children in eight countries. In their review, they found that parent stimulation of the child in the family showed a consistently stronger relationship with intelligence, motivation and achievement than did

the measures of socioeconomic status.[14] The family variables measured by these studies are changeable; they have been identified as aspects of the environment that can be readily influenced by programs to support parent efforts to improve family settings.[15] The following revised assumption creates a basis for parents and teachers to determine conditions in the family to increase academic competence.

New Assumption 3. The important variables in the family environment that affect academic competence can be altered to support the learning of children.

Just as the family has been mistakenly viewed as a place where little could be done to influence the learning abilities of children, so has the school been seen as a setting that can not be improved by educators initiating actions from inside the institution.

Existing Assumption 4. The organizational conditions that hinder teachers from including home environment as part of the curriculum are practically impossible to influence from inside the school.

In their hierarchical organizations, educators typically see change coming from outside their own realm of control. For example, teachers look to the principals or department heads for the schedule; principals turn to the central office for curriculum; and central office administrators approach the School Board for new policy guidelines. Given this perspective of looking elsewhere, the responsibility for improvement that educators can assume is undermined at each level, as are the feelings of competence and security they permit themselves. When this happens, educators tend to use the organiza-

tional variables they do control as protection against outside suggestions or assistance for improvement. For, paradoxically, there is a certain comfort when others are responsible for change, even when one is dissatisfied with current conditions. The comfort comes from knowing that an outsider is accountable and, at the same time, is not as knowledgeable as an insider about the conditions that need to change. Despite their initial protests to the contrary, teachers and school administrators will acknowledge that what happens in the classroom or school primarily depends on them. While change in organizational conditions may be limited or directed by decision makers outside the school, the people who bear responsibility for and actually implement improvements are inside.

It is unlikely, however, that efforts to genuinely include parents in curriculum development will be effective unless a shift occurs concerning the responsibility for change borne by the people closest to the teaching/learning process. Schools do exist that effectively combine family and school environments in curriculum planning. Further, there are organizational means to permit parents and teachers to communicate.[16] But unless educators support and encourage individuals from their midst who take responsibility for altering organizational conditions, the school will continue to breed system loyalists who use the institution as a protection against improvement by shifting the responsibility for change to outsiders who cannot implement improvements without them. The assumption that schools cannot be improved from within to permit parents and teachers

to collaborate must be revised as part of an expanded way of thinking about the potential partnership of the family and school.

New Assumption 4. Teachers and administrators can provide leadership from inside the school to develop curriculum that appropriately combines family and school environments.

Correcting these four existing assumptions that separate families and schools opens the way to considering appropriate teaming of parents and teachers. Both groups must re-consider and revise their assumptions to realize: that academic competence is fostered both in families and in schools; that their counterparts have an appropriate role in making decisions about the child's development; that variables in the family environment related to improving learning can be altered; and that the school can be re-organized from within to promote cooperation with the family. Most likely, agreement on revised assumptions will be reached gradually, as the result of shared practical experiences in mutual projects. The final section of this paper proposes a design that would translate these expanded ways of thinking into decisions about family and school environments for learning.

Design for Teacher-Parent Teaming

Organized efforts by schools to involve parents can be categorized in five ways, according to the roles parents are expected to play.[17] The parents' most common role is as an audience--for school newsletters, at PTA meetings, or during school visits. Second, parents work in schools as volunteers, who assist as teacher aides or

student chaperones. Third, parents are involved in schools as paid para-professional employees, often with a responsibility for organizing parent or community involvement programs. Fourth, parents have traditionally participated as policy-makers, frequently in an advisory capacity at the local school or in a legislative capacity as members of school boards. Fifth, parents are involved as direct and active teachers of their children in the family. Typically, parent education programs focus on helping parents learn more effective ways of working with their children.

These existing roles for parent involvement frequently maintain a certain distance between parents and teachers, a distance sometimes created by formal role definitions. Often, an implied superior-inferior relationship surfaces, sometimes with parents in control as policy-makers, sometimes with educators dictating to parental audiences. Rarely do parents and teachers collaborate with similar status and responsibilities. The missing role of parent-teacher teams for increasing learning of children in families and schools may explain why so few parents become involved. For example, parents who attend scheduled parent-teacher conferences are more likely to be parents of children exhibiting high success in school.[18] Further, volunteer programs have been found to attract parents who have more positive attitudes and more sophisticated child management skills to begin with.[19] These findings suggest that until parents and teachers can find ways to collaborate more as equals and bring different strengths and data to the common task of helping children learn, parent programs

organized through the school will only reach a narrow audience.

Teaming, then, is one possible direction for promoting more productive mergers between parents and teachers. A design for teaming that includes four key educational functions is suggested here. This design is one way to center parent-teacher collaboration on the learning of children. The design is illustrated in Figure 1. In brief, the functions are: (1) building a shared platform of educational values and expectations that establishes reasons for learning and guides the teaching process; (2) diagnosing a child's learning needs and characteristics to determine favorable curriculum conditions; (3) planning and implementing environments that will make desired learning possible; and (4) evaluating the effectiveness of the learning environments that are created in families and schools. Each part of the design is explained, with the third function (planning and implementing environments) receiving more in-depth consideration because of its practical implications for revitalizing the home and improving the school curriculum.

Building a Platform

First, and most fundamentally, parents and teachers can team to build a shared platform of educational values and expectations that will shape the settings for learning they create. On their side, teachers need to understand the power and importance of the informal educational processes used in the families and communities of their students. For example, teachers of Black children can be taught by parents to appreciate African-derived world views and values. In the

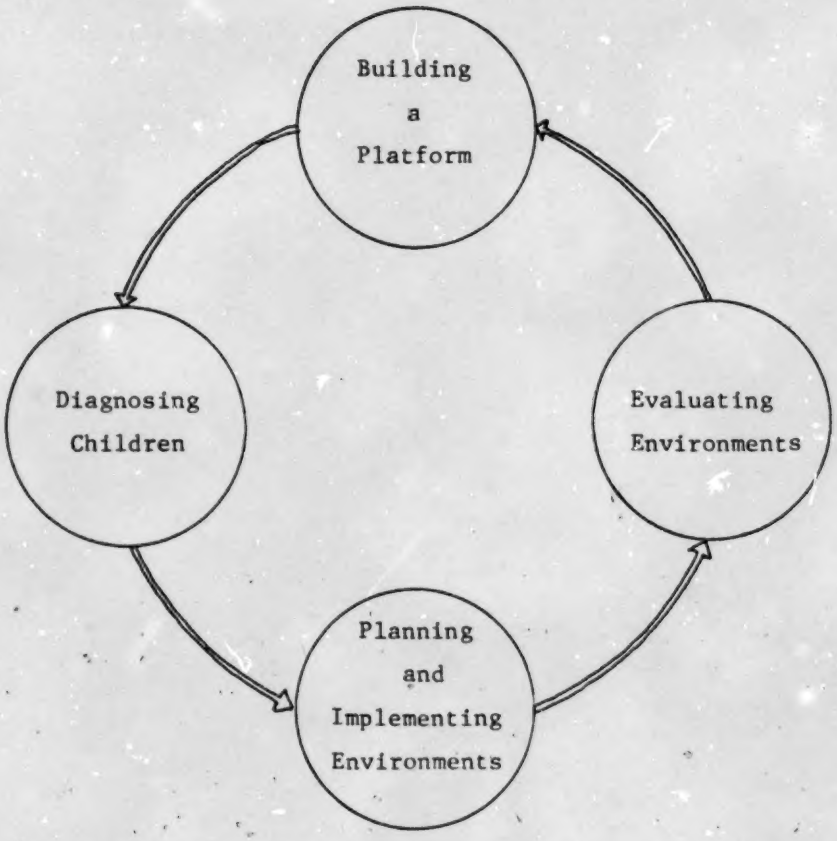

FIGURE 1

FUNCTIONS OF PARENT-TEACHER TEAMING

process, the teachers may become more responsive to the adaptations children from any highly personalized culture must make to cope with the more regulated forms and standardized procedures of school bureaucracies. In plain words, the "professionals" themselves must learn from parents about their students' cultures if they desire to adjust the school environment to take advantage of the informal variables that are a critical part of the way the child perceives and learns. As Bernstein puts it, if the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher."[20]

When parents send their children to a school that does not mirror the values and traditions of the child's family and community life, they apprehensively make an implicit deal with the teacher. In this arrangement, the teacher is to provide opportunities to learn skills and attitudes necessary for success in the mainstream culture. However, these opportunities can come dear for many parents and children. To master and internalize necessary academic and social skills, many children must "make themselves over" to a degree; by altering their speech patterns, by reconsidering certain values, or by relaxing some previous connections to family and peers. Unless parents and teachers can reach some agreements as to the importance of school learnings and the style in which they are presented, the arrangement can become a painful ordeal for the child. It can lead to a sense of not belonging in school or in the family.

The purpose for communication between parents and teachers

about an educational platform is to allow both groups to enter a partnership with greater confidence. With mutual support, the children involved can meaningfully expand their skills and aspirations, authentically blending the cultural gifts and environmental strengths represented by the family and school into a personally satisfying set of competencies and values. The greater the difference between family culture and school norms, the greater the need for parents and teachers to work hard at establishing a common platform of shared educational values and expectations. Such understandings between parents and teachers provide the child with a framework to make some sense out of conflicting worlds at home and school rather than being forced into an either-or choice between the two settings. But the building of a common platform has often been neglected. In most cases parents and teachers must start at the very beginning. As Lightfoot puts it,

> Because they come together as strangers who share in the common task of education and socialization (teachers and parents) must engage in a relatively self-conscious and painstaking task of discovering each other. The process of learning about each other's values, styles and modes of communication may take relatively obscure and trivial forms at first, as parents, teachers and children begin to feel each other out. But the real message is not trivial; it is the initial phase of learning to act and interact in an authentic and meaningful way.[21]

In short, the first and most fundamental educational function that can be accomplished through parent-teacher teaming is the establishment of a basic agreement about appropriate learning for children. Instead of plugging parents into prescribed roles in a program the school has already developed, the school needs to first

involve parents in determining the reasons for education. We believe a foundation for learning that both family and school environments support can develop if parents and teachers, the people closest to the learner, take the necessary time and personal initiative to work as a team.

Diagnosing Children

Parents and teachers can also team to diagnose a child's specific learning needs and characteristics. The purpose of this part of the design for teaming is to determine skills and content to be learned and to identify how the child learns best. Parents who are knowledgeable of the child's behavior in a context outside school should provide a corrective check and balance to a school-based diagnosis. It is important to blend results from paper and pencil instruments or classroom observations by teachers with insights of parents who sample, by observation and informal talks, a wider range of behavior in the family setting. Through discussions, parents can learn more about developmental stages and the structure of subject matter and they can provide teachers with clues that might hold the key to unlocking this child's motivation to learn. If academic competence is a mixture of mastery of pre-requisite skills with desire to learn well, the different viewpoints and data sources that parents and teachers can share will enrich their mutual understanding of the child and improve the effectiveness of their efforts to help children learn.

Planning and Implementing Environments for Learning

Academic strengths and weaknesses and personal characteristics of children are identified in the previous function of teaming. Next, in the third part of the design, the resulting data are used to decide a planned curriculum. This expressed curriculum consists of conditions or variables that are implemented in family and school environments through efforts of parents and teachers. Of course, specific environmental variables and their varied degrees of intensity are arranged in either setting according to the nature of individual learners. It is possible, however, to identify some positive conditions of families that are alterable and thus can be developed as part of the curriculum. These general conditions might also be considered appropriate for encouraging learning in school environments that make up the early elementary years (nursery through third grade).

Bloom points out that in recent years increased attention has been given to studies to improve environmental conditions in families. These studies include use of home visitors, special courses for parents, parent involvement in the school for brief periods of time, as well as the provision of audio-visual and written materials and games to be used at various points in the child's development. This research shows that what parents do with children can be influenced, and the effects of such changes on the children's school learning are meaningful.[22] The alterations parents make in behavior toward their children can be considered purposefully designed curricula to promote

academic competence. Bloom identifies some of the environmental variables that we think can be mutually planned by parents and teachers and implemented in families: contribution of parents to language development; encouragement of children to learn well; aspirations of parents for their children; provision of help in learning when the child most needs it; and ways in which time and space are organized.[23] Bloom goes on to state,

> Such variables, when combined, correlate +.70 to +.80 with measures of school achievement. In general, the correlations are highest with school achievement involving reading, vocabulary, and problem solving and lowest with spelling and arithmetic computation. These results suggest that the home has greatest influence on the language development of the child, his general ability to learn, and his motivation to learn well in school. The home has least influence on specific skills primarily taught in the school.[24]

It is clear, then, that curriculum in the family can be altered, can contribute to children's learning, and needs to be complemented by curriculum in the school. That is, the school should support the family learning emphases and, at the same time, add conditions that assist children to master particular academic skills. One knotty problem that schools confront when they develop a complementary environment is that while parents usually concentrate on individuals, teachers primarily interact with groups. The situation of individual children within groups requires that the way a teacher interacts with children can not be to the benefit of some and to the detriment of others. It is possible, of course, to organize schools so that a single teacher engages with an individual child. Yet, the persistent reality is that a teacher faces a group. Solid attempts to

meet individual differences in this sensitive setting can be supported by the larger school environment.

Experience suggests to us that there are variables of teacher-child interaction in schools that might make a difference in academic success for all children. It is likely that these variables, similar to those in the family, can be developed if they do not currently exist. The context for teaching and learning would be characterized by: setting of clear standards of excellence, provision of help in learning when children need it most, emphasis on caring about personal welfare of children, provision of positive reinforcement and encouragement for children to learn, and collaboration with parents for children's learning in the family. A teacher would engage with a child within an environment that is intended to be equal for all children. A teacher would strive for both equality of educational opportunity and outcome.

This third function of the design for teaming has special importance because it also includes some practical and concrete ways that parents and teachers can work together to implement environments that combine the family and school. We will not suggest actions for realizing all of the family and school variables identified above. We will, however, consider implementation of some structured opportunities for learning and specific practices for reinforcement of desired behavior.

Structured opportunities for children to interact with a wide variety of people and sources of stimulation can contribute to

language development.[25] For example, when teachers and parents provide supplemental books, take the child to the library or bookmobile, work with plants or gardens, cook together, discuss the adult's friends and experiences, or share organized activities like story telling or recreation, measures of academic competence in language are likely to increase.[26] Another example of a practical family-school effort is the provision of "home learning recipes" developed by teachers to be implemented by parents--specific, no-cost, written activities to reinforce and supplement instruction conducted in school. Thus far, when sent to families on a regular basis in Title I, bilingual, or suburban school communities, these basic skills activities have contributed to improved reading and math scores.[27]

Parents and teachers can also team to improve the organization of time and space to study, either in the family or in school. If time and space are set aside and work the child can complete is provided, an increase in the amount of time spent on learning tasks is likely to pay dividends in improved learning. A further example of a structured opportunity to learn is the development of an early warning system in which either the parent or the teacher informs their counterpart that the child needs extra help. As Bloom notes, the provision of help when the child most needs it is an obvious way to avoid the development of learning errors.[28]

In addition to structuring learning opportunities, parents and teachers can team to implement reinforcement practices that motivate

children to learn and behave well. There should be some agreement among adults about the intensity to which they will reward children for learning. That is, the variety, frequency, amount, and kind of reinforcement they plan to provide should be discussed and decided. One direct way to provide reinforcement is for parents and teachers to target specific academic skills for improvement, and then schedule reinforcement practices in both settings to foster the desired behaviors. In his review of twenty-four studies and projects using this approach, Barth reports consistent improvement on even the most persistent learning problems.[29]

In another series of studies of the learning environments of high achievement oriented families, Rosen suggests that motivation for achievement is generated by at least two kinds of family socialization practices he labels achievement training and independence training.[30] Rosen's major conclusion is that the psychological impetus to excel in situations involving standards of excellence comes from practice and support in similar situations. In this view, parents and teachers can promote high achievement by setting standards of excellence and by rewarding the child's persistence, concentration, and industriousness in reaching these levels. While achievement training aims to get children to do things well, independence training attempts to teach them to do things on their own. In this training, parents and teachers can reach agreement as to what degree the environment should stress individual or collective behavior, and to what extent a future or a present orientation will be promoted. These decisions may prove

to be complex and difficult, but they are likely to be necessary to prevent family and school environments from working at cross-purposes.

The third function of parent-teacher teaming is perhaps the broadest and most open-ended. The identification and implementation of family and school variables moves the idea of curriculum as environments for learning into practical operation.

Evaluating Environments

The fourth suggested part of the design for teaming is the evaluation of the learning environments created in families and schools. This function encourages both groups to confirm the value of their approaches or to question and revise their initial ideas developed as a platform. Further, evaluating the environmental conditions they have decided and implemented together also provides teachers and parents with a responsibility for visiting their counterpart's setting. When an aspect of the environment (e.g., a home or classroom quiet study area) that has been designed for a specific purpose is being observed, there is an opportunity to demonstrate what has been accomplished and to be receptive to praise and additional ideas. Hence, it becomes possible to build on the positive. Like any learners, parents and teachers need to arrive at points when they can visualize their progress. This part of the design for teaming provides information about family and school environments, and thus furnishes data which parents and teachers can use to compensate for deficiencies while working together to improve conditions in either

setting. The evaluation function assists adults to determine, through direct observation and informal discussion, if what was planned for altering family and school settings was actually implemented. The joint evaluation would also include testing and observation of children to indicate academic gains that were accomplished during an established time period. Hence, parents and teachers would keep informed about what children learned well and what still needs to be learned. If approached as a means for improvement, evaluation can be an occasion for generating renewed effort to accomplish a common purpose of developing environments to increase children's learning.

This design, then, includes four interrelated functions for helping children learn. Through teaming, parents and teachers move from building a platform of values and expectations to determining children's learning needs, to planning and implementing environments, to evaluating the effectiveness of conditions in families and schools. We are suggesting that teaming to carry out these functions is a missing element in the current roles parents and teachers have for educating children. It is anticipated that successful teaming will aid in narrowing the separation between parents and teachers.

Closing

Despite increasing knowledge of the joint influence of families and schools on learning, educators are not fully exploring ways that parents and teachers can support each other. As a result, school curriculum is developed without considering family conditions. The

two settings are treated as separate entities. This is unfortunate because the coming together of families and schools is one means for improving learning for children from poor environments who are not meeting with high success in the existing curriculum. Bloom adds,

> It is clear that when the home and the school have congruent learning emphases, the child has little difficulty in his later school learning. But when the home and the school have divergent approaches to life and to learning, the child is likely to be penalized severely by the school--especially when school attendance is required for ten or more years.[31]

Children are left alone to make sense out of serious differences that exist in the places where they are expected to live and learn. Often the separation between families and schools results in young children being torn between loyalties to one place and demands of another. However, they do not need to experience an unnecessary mismatch. Parents and teachers are starting to realize the success and benefits children receive when families and schools work together to promote academic competence.

We present three directions for collaboration among the adults who share responsibility for the education of children. First, it is our hope that the definition of curriculum as environments for learning will assist parents and teachers to identify dimensions of curriculum that they can develop in families and schools. Second, we describe a way of thinking that consists of four assumptions about educational roles of parents and teachers. The assumptions can bring adults closer together because they provide a basis for shared improvement of environments. Finally, a design for teaming of parents and

teachers identifies actions adults can consider when developing environments in families and schools. These three directions aid parents and teachers in establishing connections between two settings that are crucial to children's learning.

A common bond between parents and teachers seldom develops naturally or spontaneously. Hence, one priority in the years ahead will be the development of leadership that can bring these adults together as a constructive force for action. Because of their mutual concern for children, parents and teachers who are separate now will discover a commitment that binds them together in the future--they will insure opportunities in the family and school for increasing the number of children who reach equality in learning.

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[3]For examples of variables in home and classroom environments that are likely to influence school achievement see: Benjamin S. Bloom, "The New Direction in Educational Research: Alterable Variables." A paper adapted from Better Learning in the Schools: A Primer for Parents, Teachers, and Other Educators (New York: McGraw-Hill, in press); and presented at the Invitational Conference on Testing, Educational Testing Services, Princeton, New Jersey, October 1979.

[4]Perceptions of students, teachers, principals, and parents were gathered by means of informal discussions between the authors and the participants. Care was given to insure that various grade levels, different cultures, and social class backgrounds were represented. Data were collected in different settings, including schools and classrooms, grocery stores, food cooperatives, homes, athletic events, and shopping malls. We simply asked people, "What do you think curriculum means?" The responses were written down and patterns among various groups were identified. Also, fifty statements describing the meaning of curriculum written by teachers and principals were reviewed to determine patterns. We did not intend to conduct a highly structured and controlled data collection and analysis. Rather, our purpose was simply to gain some insight into how various people viewed the meaning of curriculum.

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